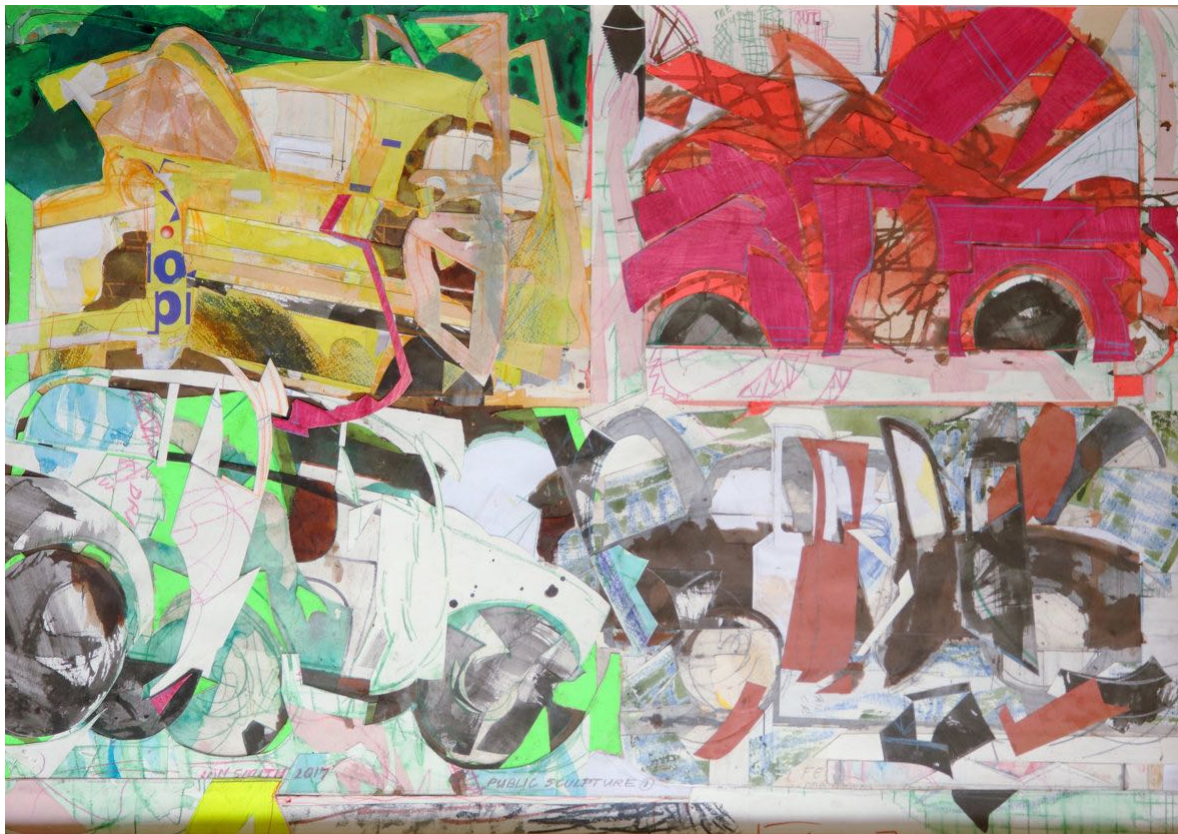


FIG TREES, FIGURES & OTHER PUBLIC SCULPTURE



IAN SMITH PAINTINGS

Exhibition Catalogue

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cover image: *Public sculpture 1* 2017, Coloured pencil, watercolour & collage, 52 × 74 cm

FIG TREES, FIGURES & OTHER PUBLIC SCULPTURE

In 2020, as I tiptoed through the 'minefield' of social sensitivities to find ways of painting my multicultural community in Logan, I wrote the following in the exhibition catalogue for my show, "The Beenleigh Line", at Logan Art Gallery : "I come to these works after 50 years of artistic experiment with all sorts of subjects and styles ... I have painted clothed or naked men and women of all skin colours in all sorts of situations; also babies, kids and older aged people. I believe I do so with integrity and defy anyone to suggest demeaning prejudice or ill-directed lasciviousness. The case for any artwork, film, book, etc should be made with respect to its author's background nature – not attacked or defended through a stack of bad or cliched precedents and stereotypical assumptions ... Rather than meticulously illustrating, I try to construct enduring, symbolic images of human existence. I bend my vision to my pictorial will. I was well into this series of paintings last December when my daughter, an artist in her 30s who has lived much of her life in Europe came to stay with me for two months. Sophie couldn't see why I was worrying about how the works might come across. My faithful daughter saw them as comparable with work by some artists she admired, of mixed European heritage and African American origins. Sophie's universal attitude reminded me of the urbane overview I had possessed during my own globe-treading days living in Europe – a universal confidence maybe now eroded in me after years back in insular Australia where pernickety political correctness competes with ongoing racism and xenophobia. I reset my mind with Sophie's universal view."

Since then, the 'minefield' has become an even more touchy area. So my continuing determination to paint and draw what I see as the most prevalent subject in World Art's history – OURSELVES, that is, the human figure – puts me in a critically risky situation. My recent nudes reveal themselves slowly, as if I have blundered accidentally into the bedrooms of strangers and our eyes take a while to adjust. Those who trusts me will see my point, if subtle or ironic. Others may stereotype and condemn me. Meanwhile, 2023's Australian of the year, Taryn Brumfitt, has distinguished herself by encouraging love of and pride in one's own body [however 'non-classical', awkward or with a disability]. She asks us all to revel in our bodies in the spirit of 'vivre la difference'. Seems like a good time to be looking again at how we portray the nude in art.

In the other component of this exhibition, the fig trees, I've tried to echo my constant return to the limbs, skin patterns and complex entanglements of the human body; and in "Fig tree with Figure" I've ended up stating the obvious – the human figure replicated in Nature. Or is it the other way around? When I started painting fig trees a few years ago, I waxed lyrical about them offering a veteran painter like me a 'mindless' way of weaving the painting's surface – across and down, across and down – a welcome relief from my lifetime of visual puzzles, demanding subject matter and layered social themes. Little did I know the fig trees would quickly turn into complex problem works themselves. Seems I can't help making things difficult for myself.

As time goes on, my contemporaries pass away around me, and in the time it takes to mourn one local friend, hundreds of children, women and men die in foreign conflicts – all with their own life stories of love and happiness – before being struck by trauma and tragedy. So certain matters, previously of ‘such socially important correctness’ just don’t seem to matter much anymore. I find myself falling between Van Morrison’s “Why must I always explain” and Billie Holiday’s blues classic “Hush now don’t explain”. The die is cast. I must just put my work out there and leave judgement to whoever looks at it. Amen. (November, 2023).

April, 2024.

Because of changed timing plans for this exhibition, I had already embarked on a new series of works by ‘Showtime’. The ‘Public Sculpture’ series, with it’s stacks of car wrecks, has a monumental quality compatible with the grandeur of my fig tree tangles, so I’ve chosen to hang them together.

Art about smashed cars is not a new idea, when you think of John Chamberland’s grim, yet ironically colourful steel sculptures of the 1960s made from actual twisted car parts. I even discovered a 1960s, high school painting of my own on the subject. Growing up in Cairns we were used to seeing smashed cars in the bush, or disintegrating in suburban backyards. I accept that painting such subjects is probably ‘commercial suicide’, because no one wants to think about car crashes – in their personal experience or affecting their friends. Yet during my lifetime, it’s been the road toll – and people’s apparent denial of it – that has bothered me most of all social afflictions. In the 1980s, ‘the age of AIDS’, while homophobia was bubbling to the surface again, people revelled in hearty heterosexual love affairs with their motorcars in spite of an alarming road toll. Then recently during the COVID years, people sought automotive outlets for their frustration with disastrous results.

And now as I ride my train to town, I look at the ever-changing stacks of smashed cars in wreckers yards along the way. And I see them as undeniable subjects for abstract expressionist art. A free form source of every possible twist, angle and variation in visual art. Then, back in the relative safety of my home, the evening news comes to haunt me again with its wrecked, burnt out cars from around the world, along with the social consequences. Once more I say amen. - *Ian Smith, Brisbane, 2024*



Schoolboy painting 1967



Through Fig Trees To Daylight 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 101 × 101 cm



Fig Tree Diptych 1 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 2 panels, 101 × 202 cm



Fig Tree Triptych With Bleeding Heart 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 3 panels, 101 × 228 cm



Fig Tree Diptych 2 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 2 panels, 101 × 202 cm



Fig Tree Diptych 3 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 2 panels, 101 × 202 cm

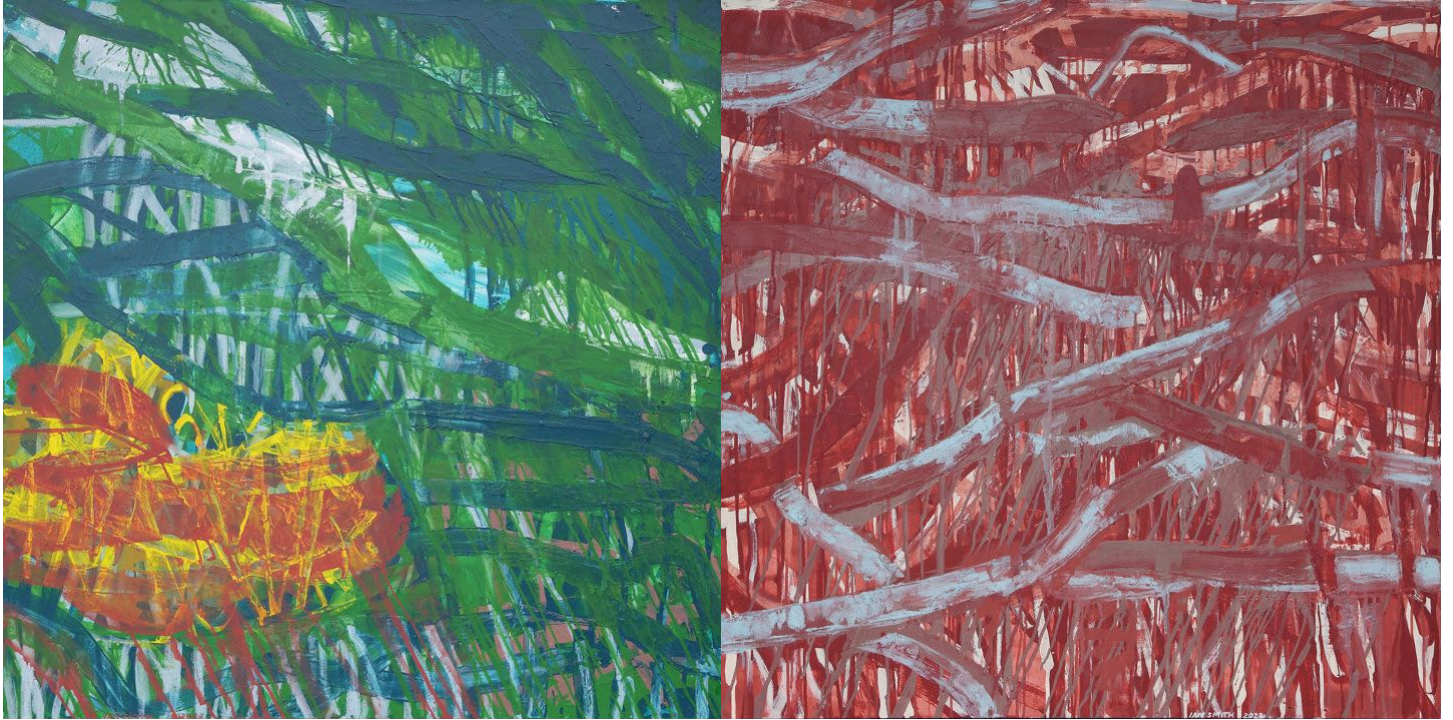


Fig Tree Diptych 4 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 2 panels, 101 × 202 cm

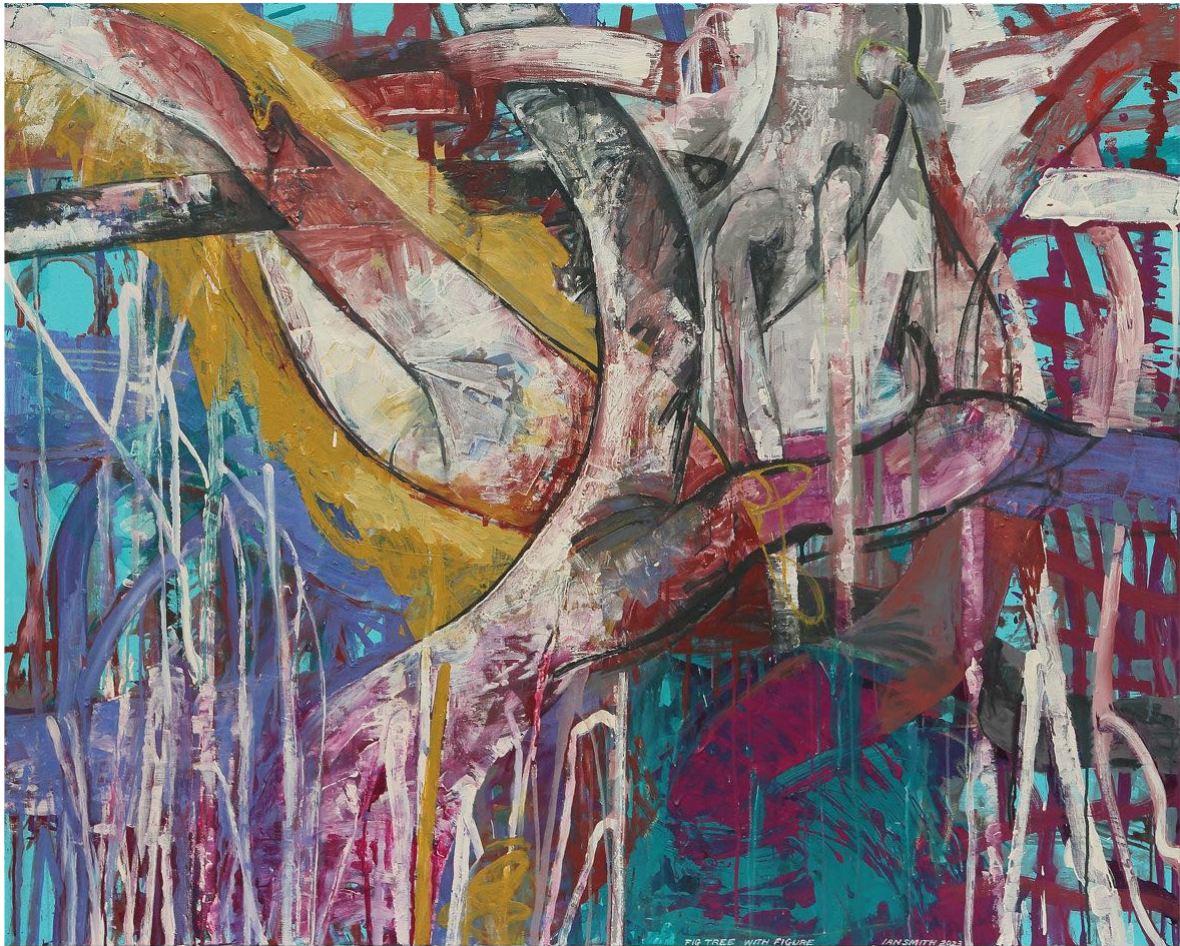


Fig Tree With Figure 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 152 cm



Island Tribes 2010, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 110 × 166 cm



Family Group In The Rainbow Motel 2008, Oil on canvas, 185 × 175 cm



Things Of My Mother And Father 2006, Oil on canvas, 120 × 120 cm



Tropical Theatre 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 144 × 180 cm



Skin & Nails 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 101 × 101 cm



Tired Train People 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 82 × 124 cm



Man In A Hole 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 101 × 71 cm



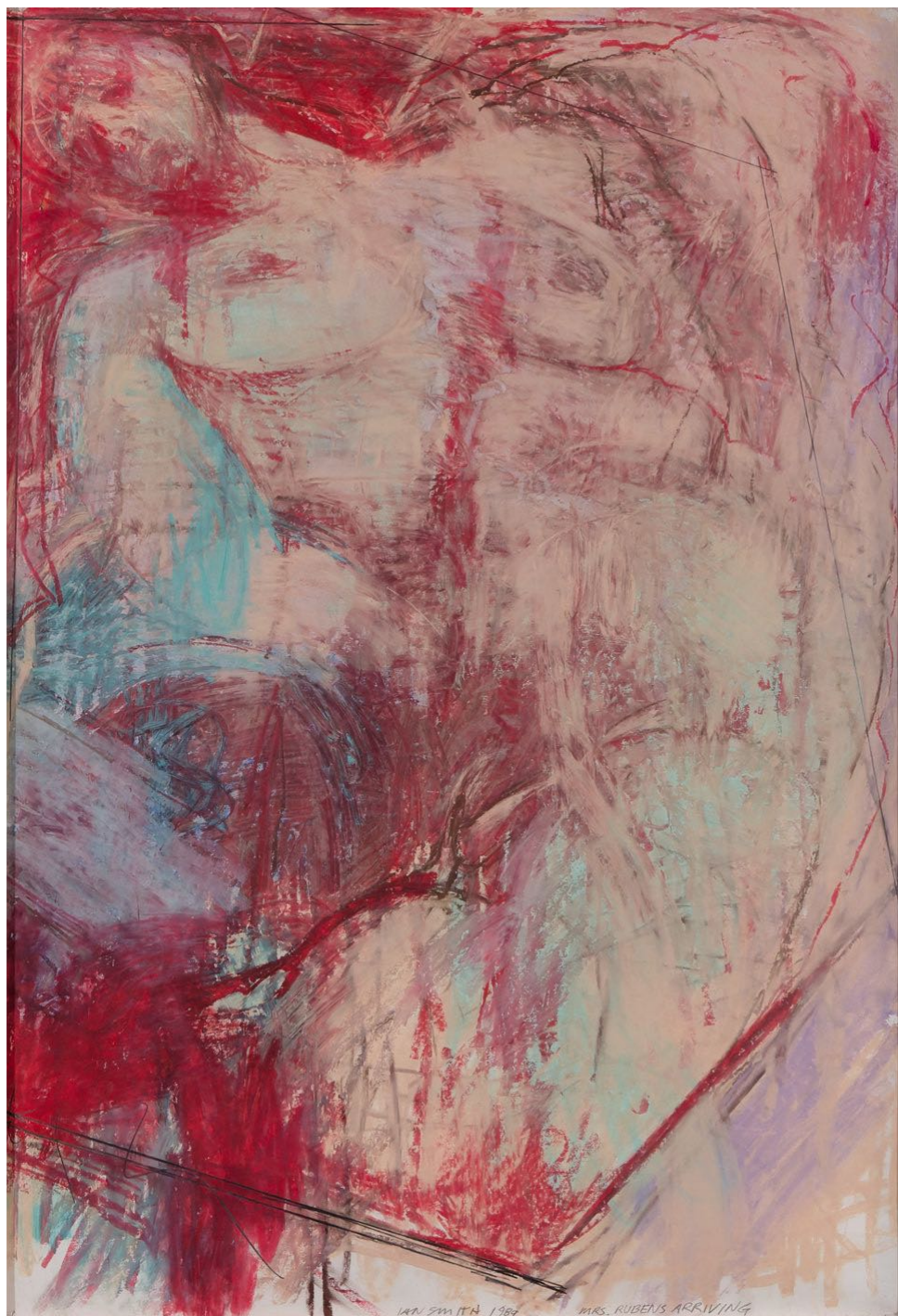
Man In A Hole 2 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 100 × 80 cm



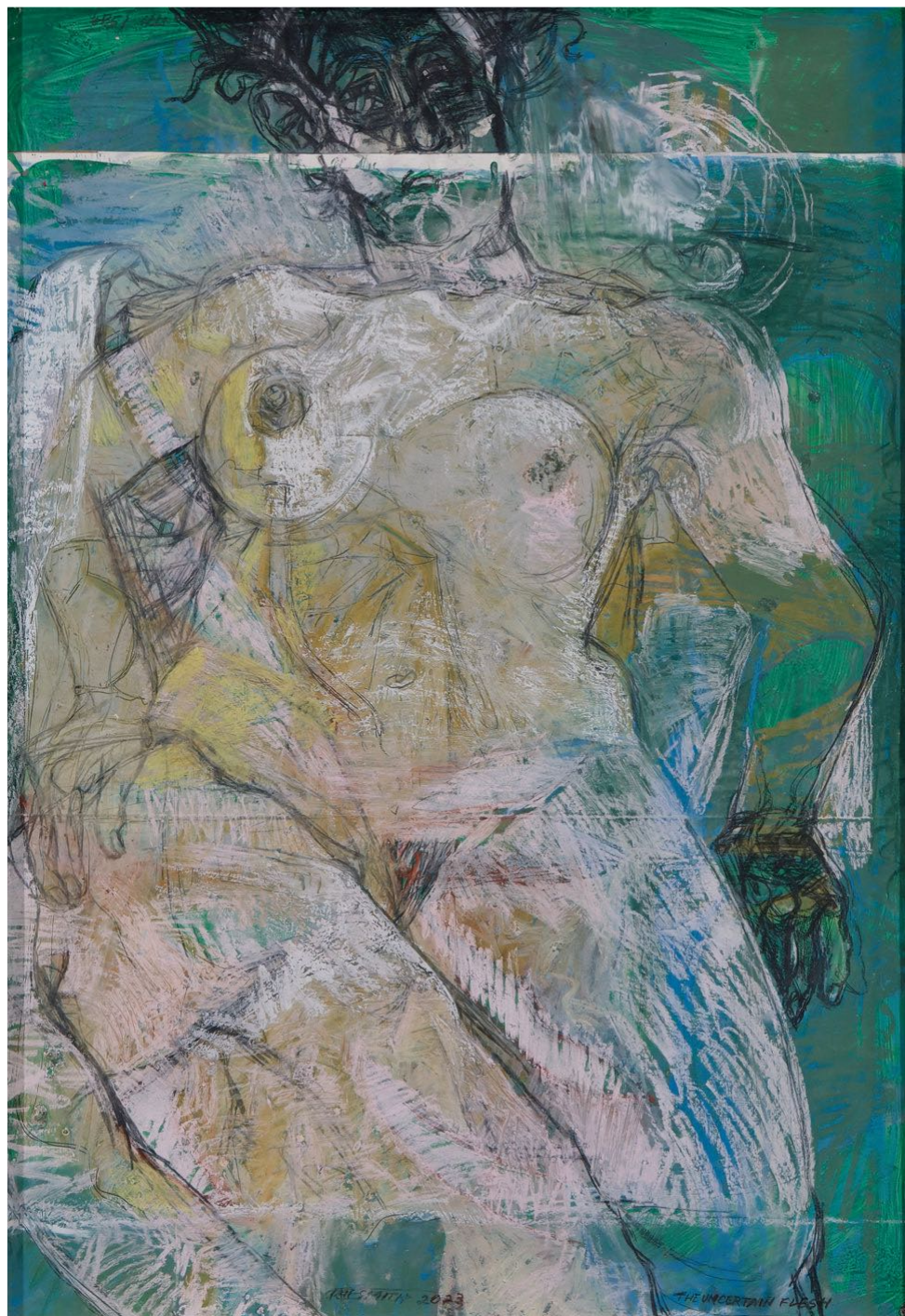
Misquoting Edvard Munch 2021, Pastel on paper, 56 x 76 cm (Private collection, Brisbane)



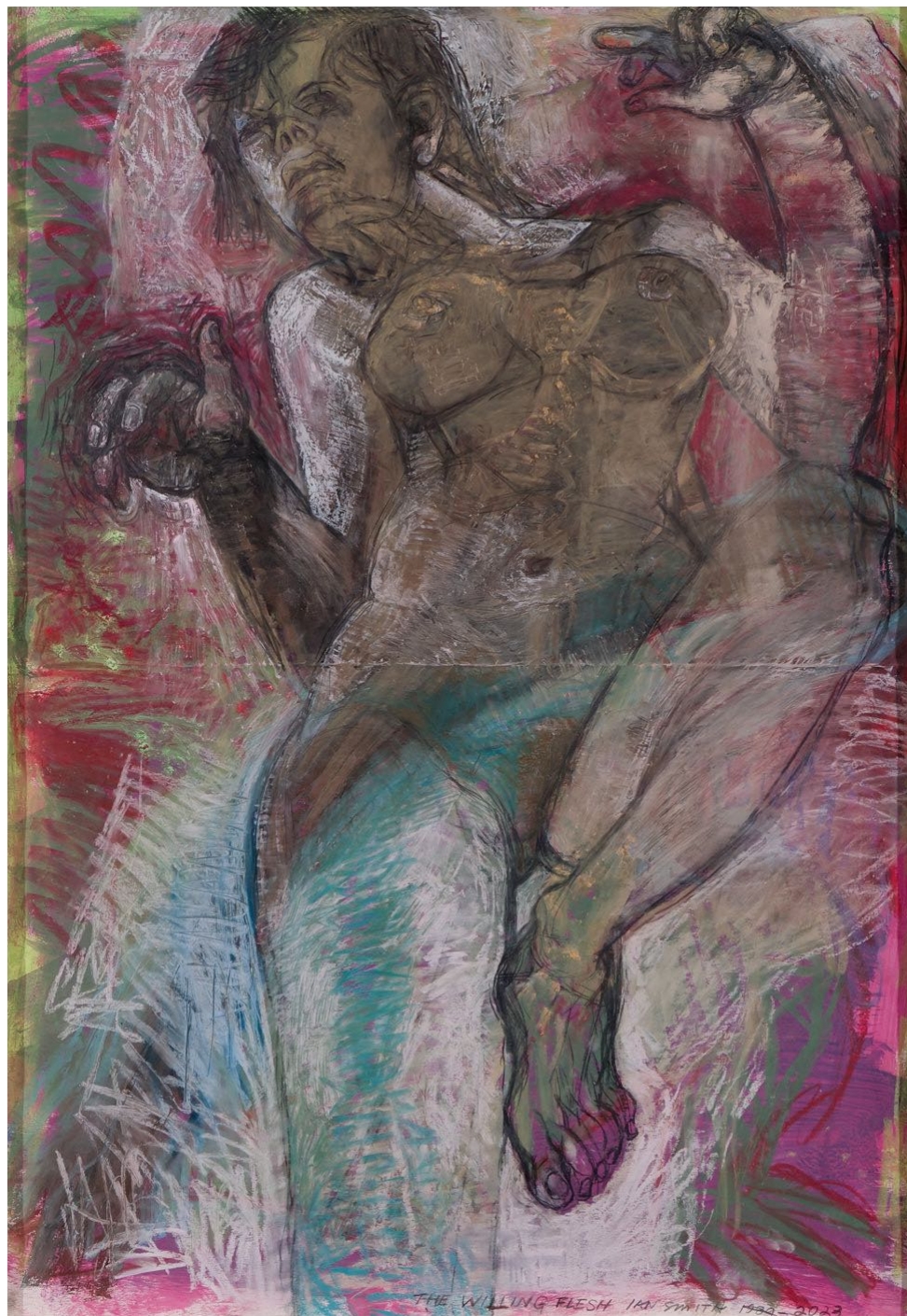
Our Separated Flesh 2021, Pastel on paper, 47 × 65 cm



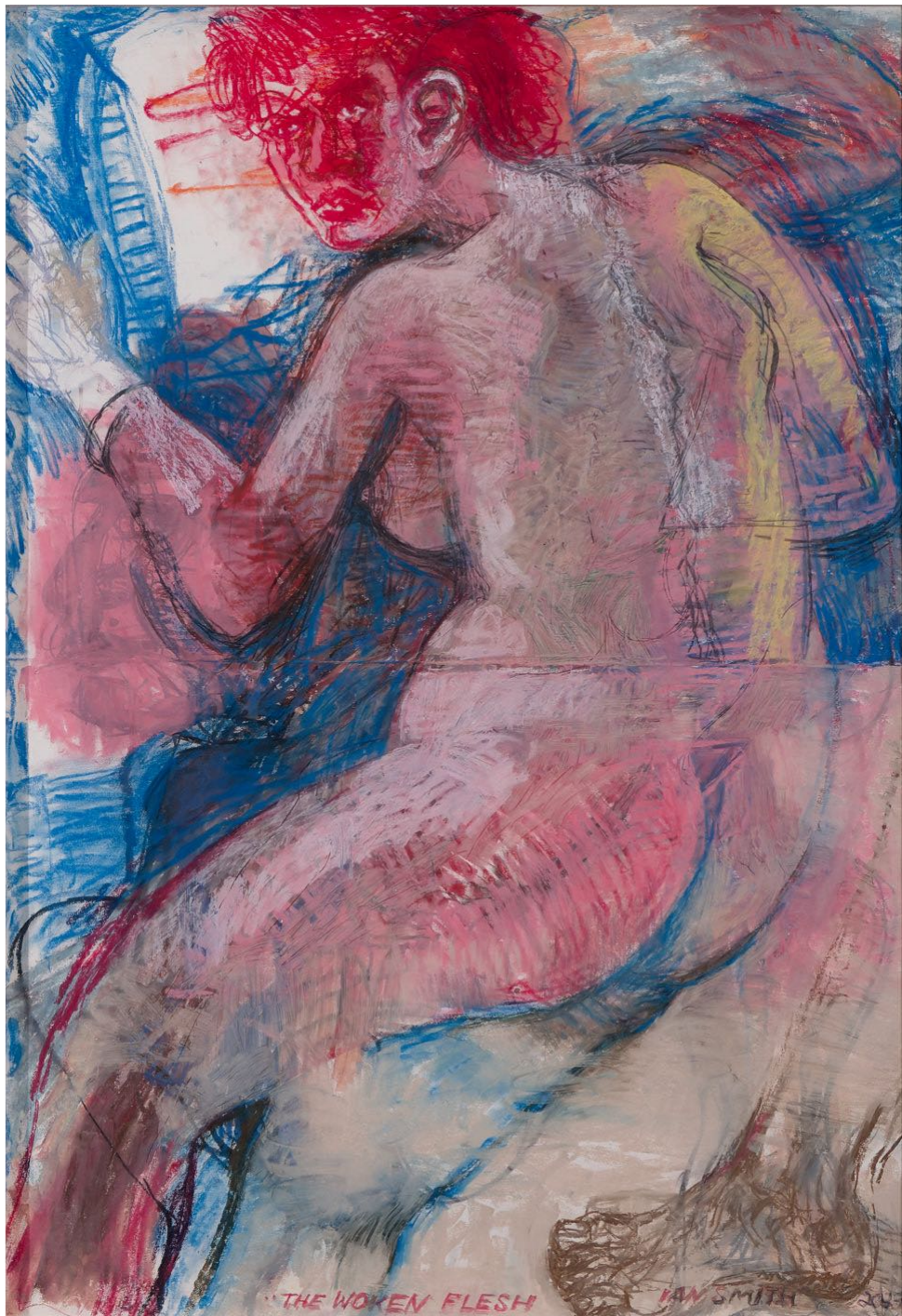
Mrs. Rubens Arriving 1989, Pastel on paper, 85 × 59 cm



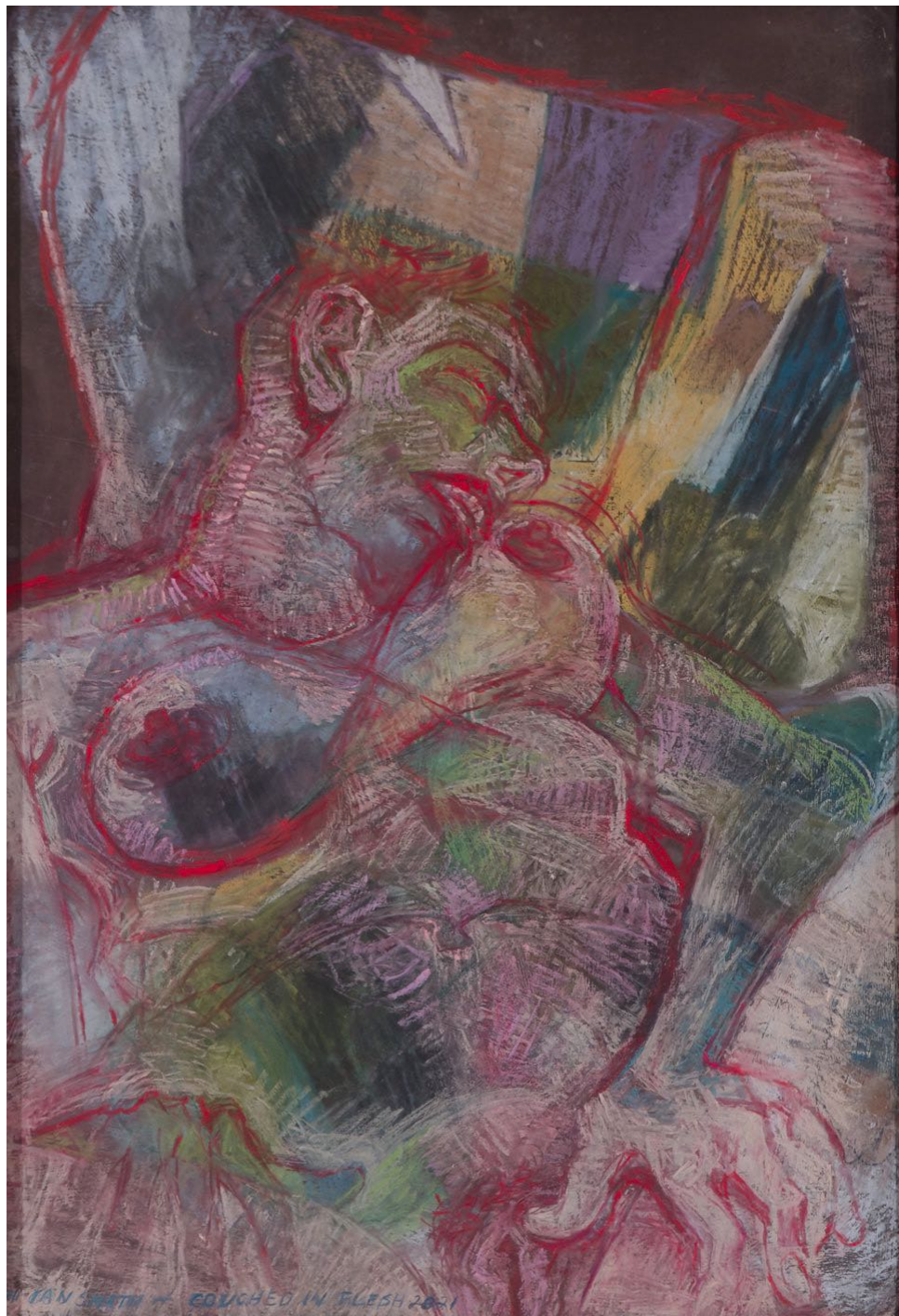
The Uncertain Flesh 2023, Pastel on paper, 85 × 60 cm



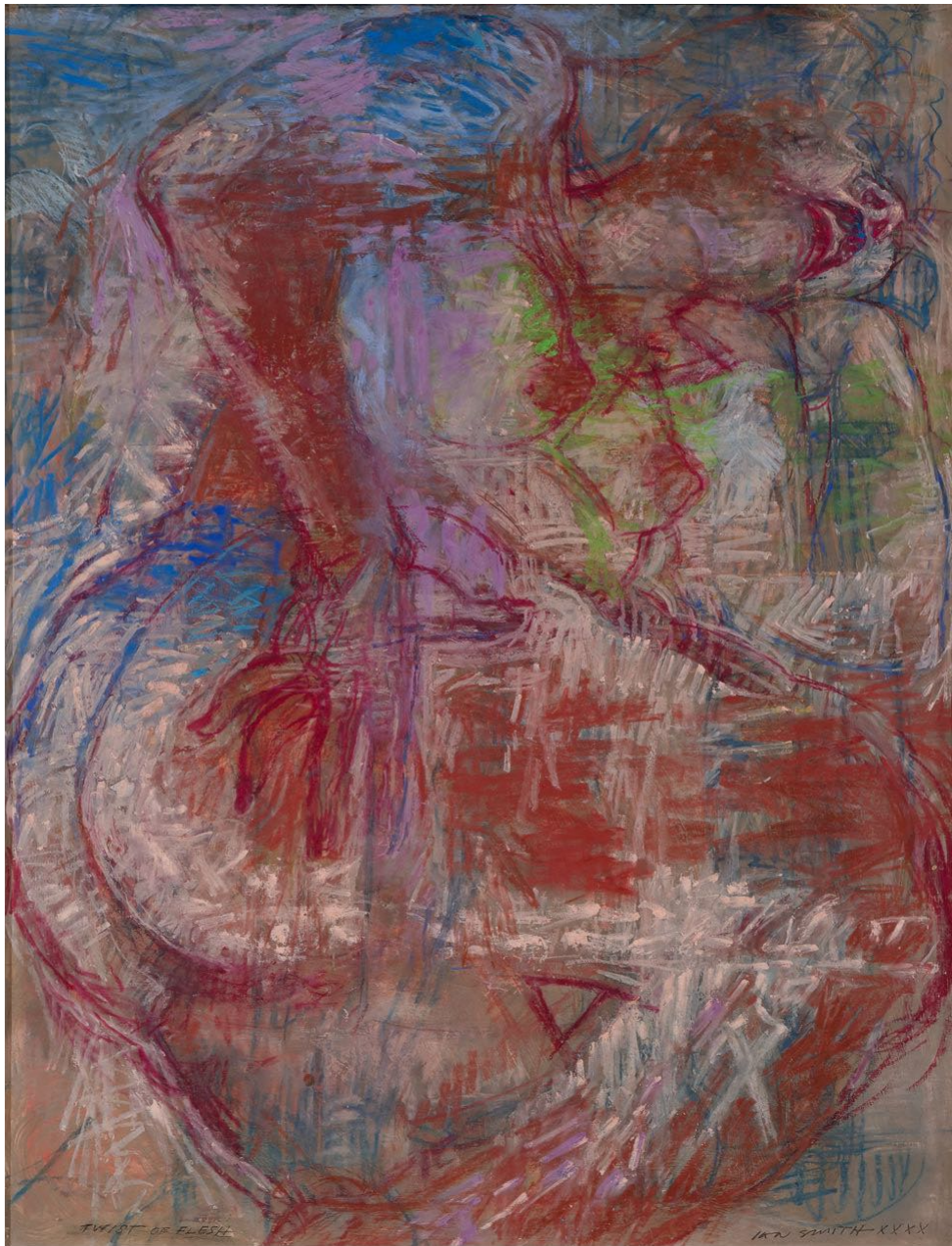
The Willing Flesh 2023, Pastel on paper, 85 × 60 cm



The Woken Flesh 2023, Pastel on paper, 85 × 60 cm



Couched In Flesh 2021, Pastel on paper, 64 × 40 cm



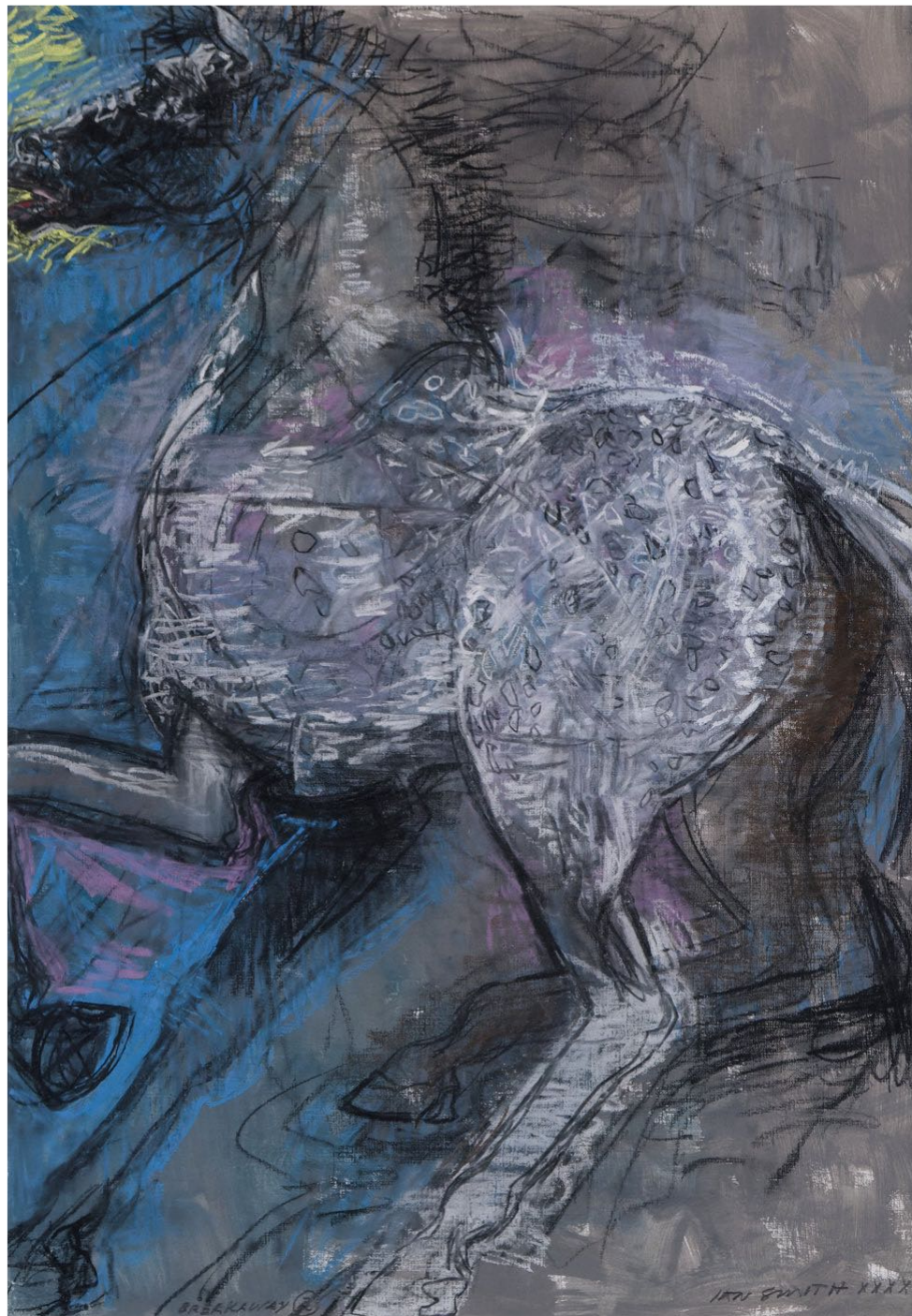
Twist Of Flesh 2020, Pastel on paper, 78 × 56 cm



Drawing You To Sleep 2018, Coloured pencil on paper, 59 × 46 cm



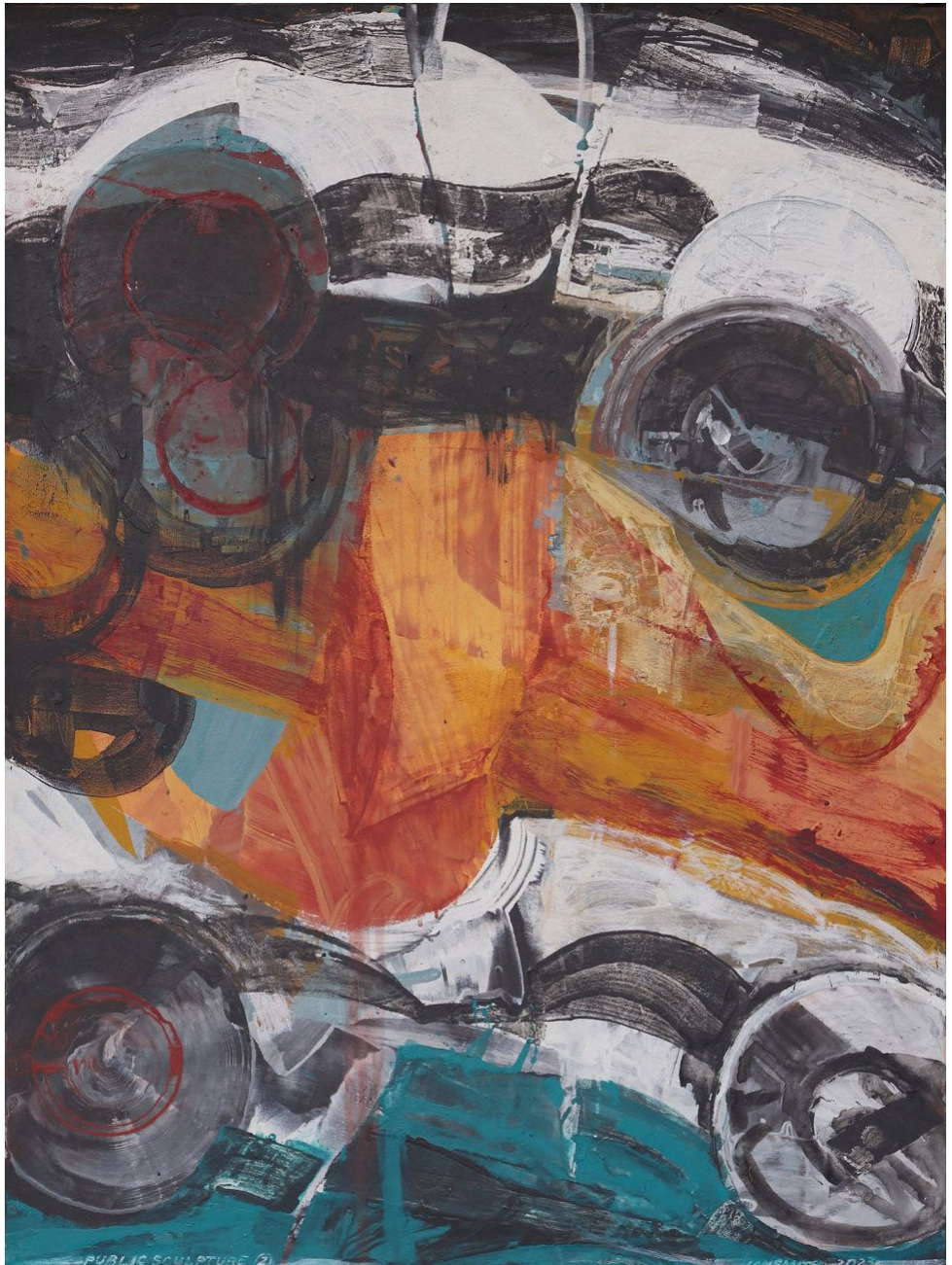
Neckline - Waistline 2021, Pastel on paper, 65 × 47 cm



Breakaway 2 2020, Pastel on paper, 60 × 41 cm



Pictorial Element 17 (Whiphand) After Whistler 2020, Pastel on paper, 60 × 41 cm



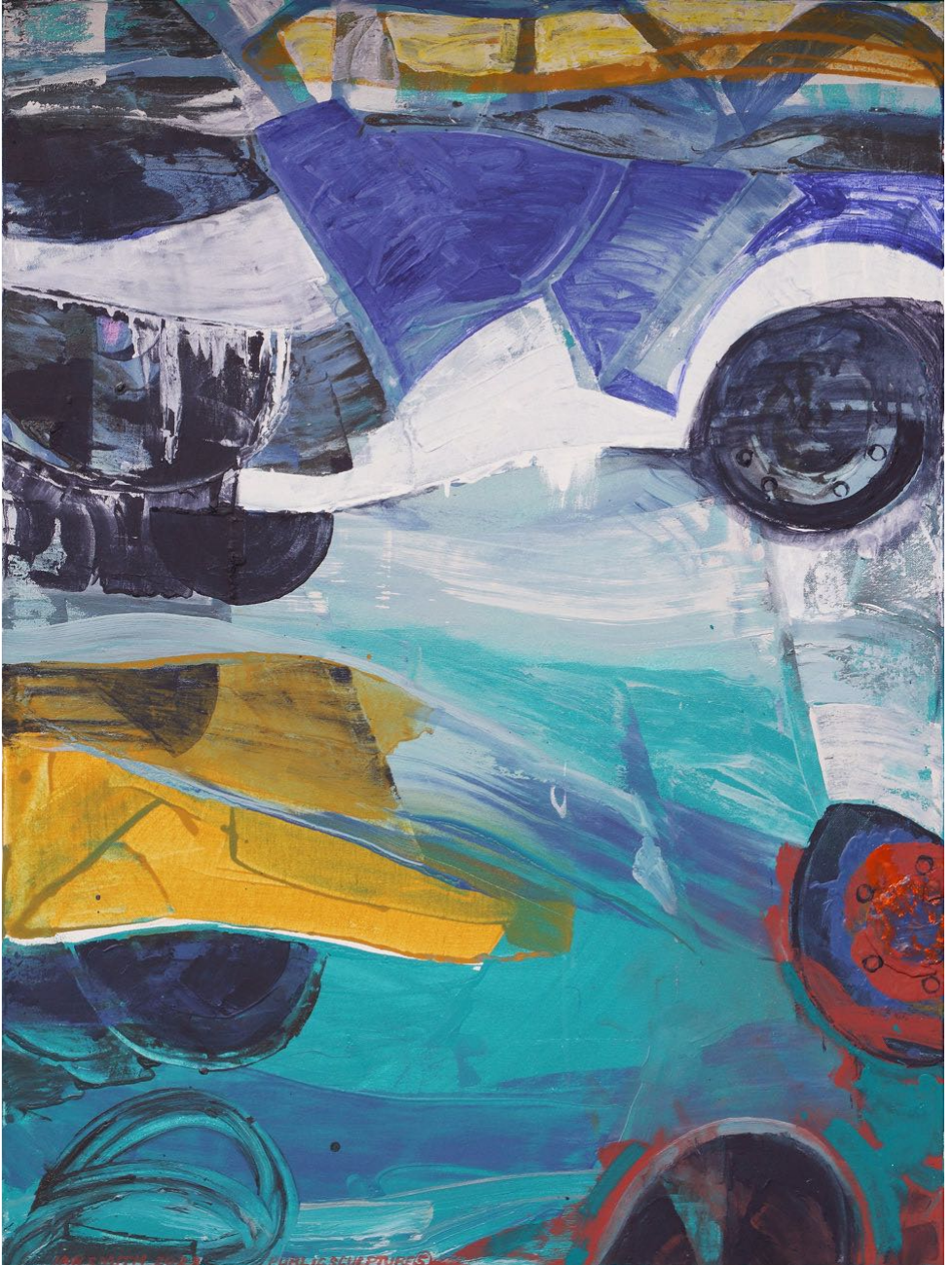
Public Sculpture 2 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 102 × 76 cm



Public Sculpture 3 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 102 × 76 cm (Private collection. Brisbane)



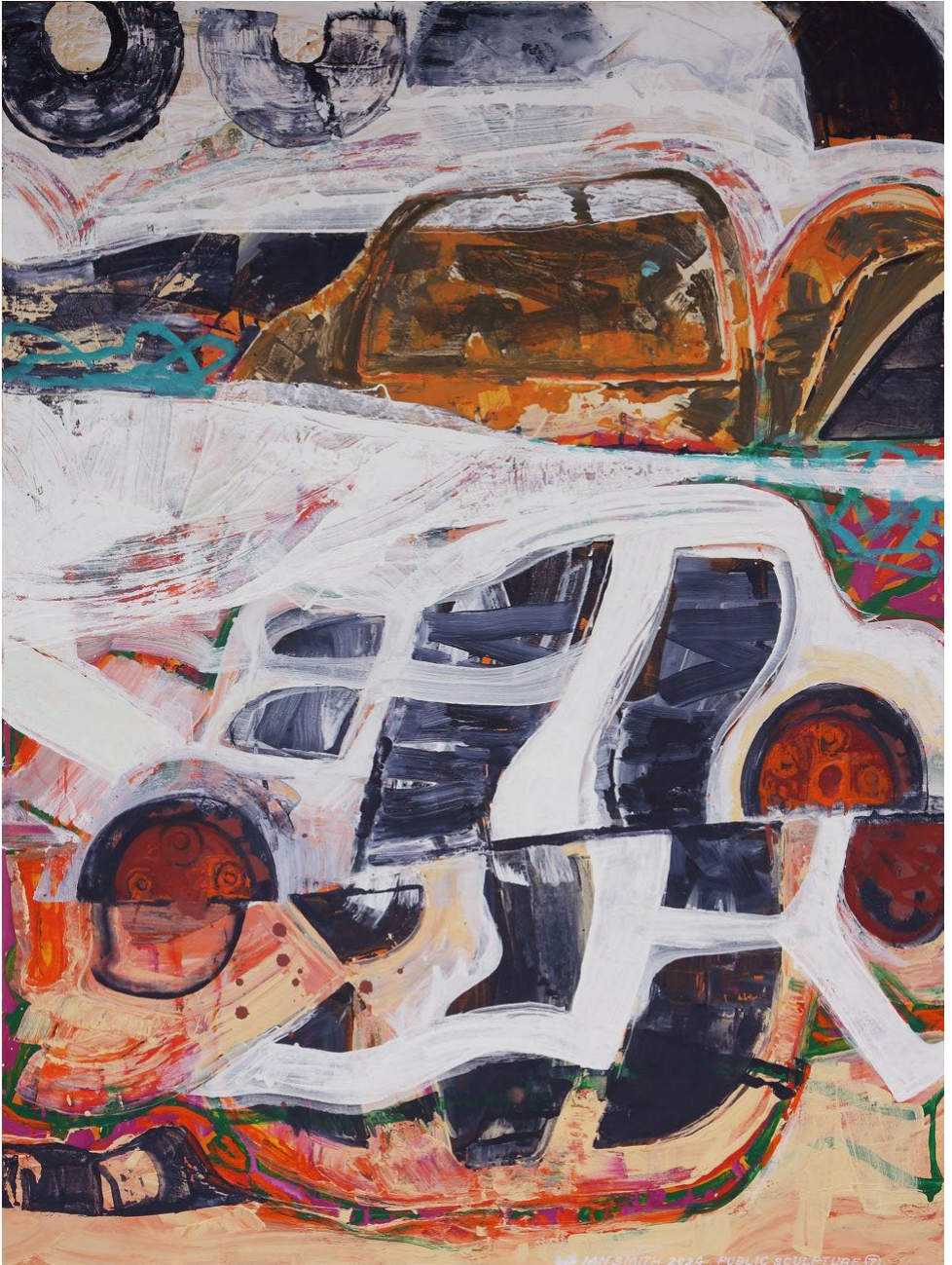
Public Sculpture 4 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 102 × 76 cm



Public Sculpture 5 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 102 × 76 cm



Public Sculpture 6 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 91 cm



Public Sculpture 7 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 91 cm



Public Sculpture 8 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 91 cm



Public Sculpture 9 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 91 cm



VAN SMITH 2024 PUBLIC SCULPTURE 10

Public Sculpture 10 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 91 cm



Red Figure 2022, Acrylic on canvas over ply, 40 × 34 cm



Green Figure 2022, Acrylic on canvas over ply, 38 × 30 cm



Seated 2023, Acrylic on canvas over ply, 32 × 31 cm



Pharaoh 2023, Acrylic on canvas over ply, 40 × 30 cm

All works are Acrylic on canvas over ply, up to 41 × 35 cm



In Black & Green 2020



In Black & Green 2020



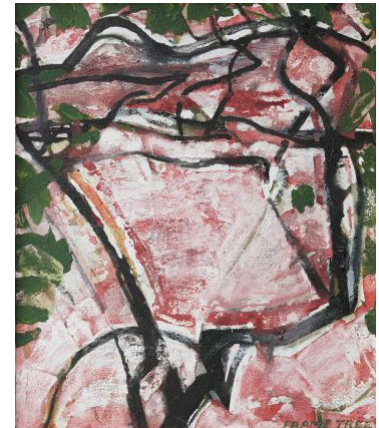
Harp Tree 2020



Another Chalice 2020



Almost Rain 2020



Frame Tree 2020



Knotted In The Frame 2021



Summary Mondrian 2021



Geomet-Tree 1 2021



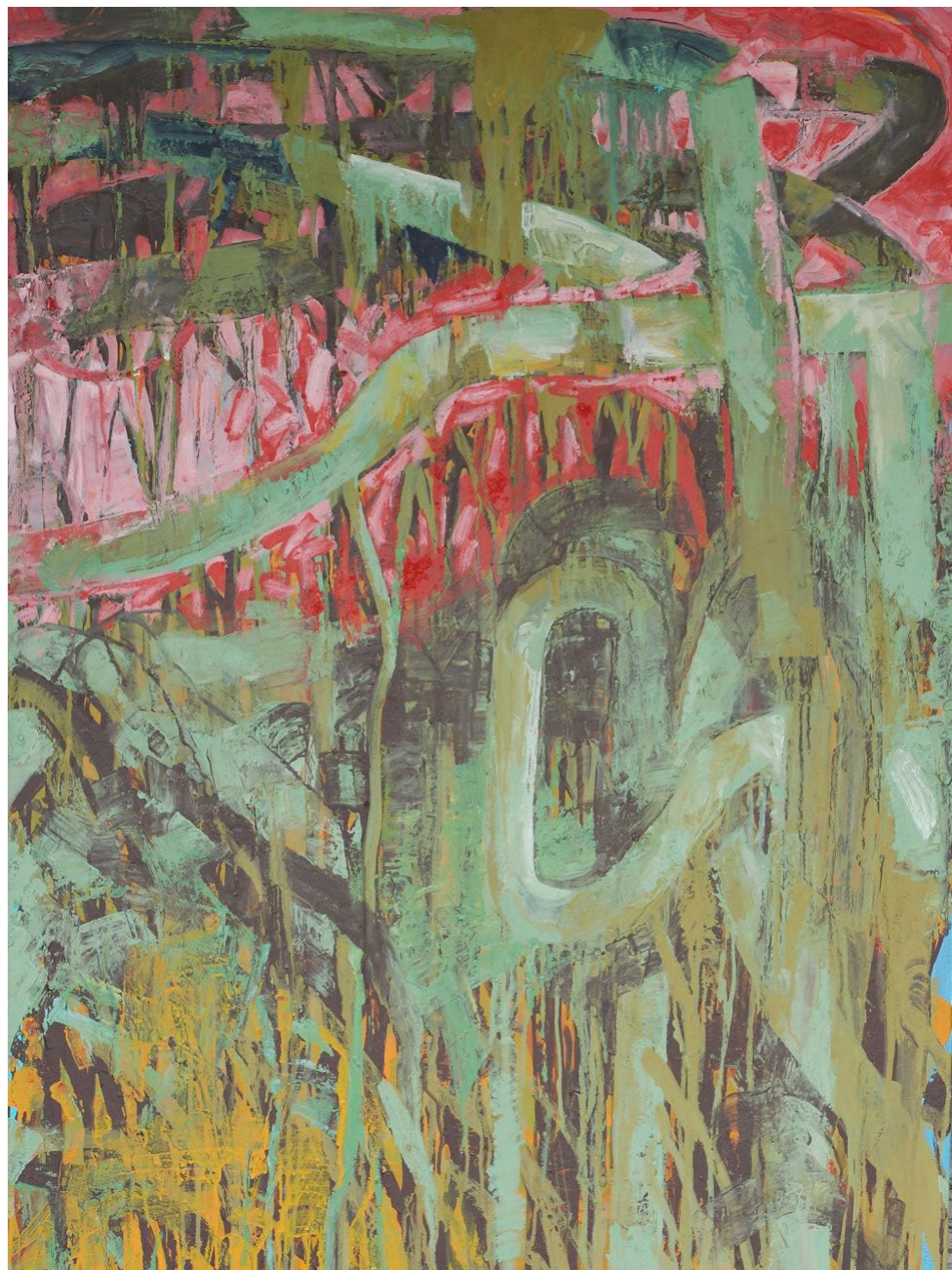
Geomet-Tree 2 2022



Over Arching Trees 2022



Fig Tree With Path 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 93 × 76 cm



Green Fig Tree 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 91 cm

IAN SMITH – Biography

Australian Collections: NGA, Canberra; NGV, Melbourne; QAG, Brisbane; GNT, Darwin; Regional and City council Galleries: Hamilton, Vic.; Karratha, WA; Cairns, Stanthorpe, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Gympie, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Townsville Logan and others; University of Qld, QUT, Griffith University, Brisbane; JCU, Townsville; Uni. Central Qld., Rockhampton; Parliament House, Canberra; Student Unions Sydney Uni., Uni. NSW, Sydney and Melbourne Uni. etc.

Overseas Collections: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Shenzhen Art Museum, China; National Collection Ghana, Emmen City Cultural Centre, Netherlands. Private collections in USA, UK, Netherlands, and Belgium – particularly in Antwerp – where Smith lived for 7 years with his Belgian wife and 2 Australian born children; 1988 to 1994 when he returned to Australia alone and lived Brisbane/Gold coast/Moreton Bay Islands, making frequent trips to Sydney and Cairns.

Born Cairns, 1950, he lived a working class, bush and beach yet artistically active boyhood. In 1968, on a Commonwealth Scholarship, he did one year of Architecture before dropping out, working in a bank for a year then moving to Melbourne to do a Diploma of Art & Design at Prahran College [1970 -1972]. 1973, painted TV sets at Channel 9, then mid-year returned to Brisbane to teach painting and drawing full-time at Qld College of Art until 1979 when he quit and has painted full-time ever since. He has staged many one man shows and been invited or contributed to numerous group shows here and overseas.

Exhibitions since 1972 in Australia and Overseas: include +/- 25 solo shows, Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane/Sydney 1972-2006; +/- 7 solo shows, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane 2006 to 2017. He is now represented by Woollongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane. Shows: Best of Works on Paper, 2018; 'Big Paintings – small paintings', 2019; 'So You Want It In Black & White', 2020; 'Across & Down', 2022; 'Fig Trees Figures & Other Public Sculpture', 2024. While living in Europe, involved in many exhibitions; most notably solo shows at Campo & Campo, Antwerp and Emmen Cultural Centre, Netherlands. He has been in numerous curated group shows in commercial and public galleries here and overseas, most recently The Gold Awards, Rockhampton Museum of Art, 2022; and The Archie 100, a Century of the Archibald Prize, AGNSW and touring 2021 to 2024. Curated solo exhibitions include 'Ian Smith – Survey', MOCA, Brisbane, 1988. 'Since I left', 1996 Cairns Regional Gallery then touring; 'On and off the Road', 2010 Gold Coast City Art Gallery then touring to 8 regional galleries, ending appropriately in Cairns. 'Homegrown Images' , Kick Arts, Cairns, 2016; 'The Beenleigh Line', Logan Art Gallery, 2020; 'Flesh & Bone', Noosa Regional Gallery, 2020.

In a career which really started as a schoolboy, his work uses images of everyday even mundane existence from cane toads to grand bridges, from explicit sexual scenes to blank roadside billboards in landscape to evoke universal issues. He has won many prizes including Tattersalls Landscape Prize, Brisbane, 2012; and been an Archibald Prize finalist 9 times over 4 decades [first time 1977, most recently 2010]. Also hung several times in the Salon des Refuses, Wynne and Sulman Prizes.



Photograph Kerrin Smith

Exhibition dates

2 July – 3 August 2024



Woollongabba Art Gallery

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